

The Facts on Education

How Can We Prevent High School Dropouts?

How do we help students stay in school?

For most people, completing secondary school has become a basic requirement to be able to live satisfying and productive lives. Much has been learned about the factors that keep young people on track to successful high school graduation.

The most important single factor is students' feeling of connection to the school and in particular, the belief by every student that there is at least one adult in the school who knows and cares about that student. Schools can do many things to promote this, such as assigning teacher advisors, and taking action early when a student shows signs of being in difficulty, both personally and academically. Schools can reach out to struggling students to offer extra support; sometimes only a small amount of such support is enough to make a big difference.

Also important are an engaging curriculum and effective teaching practices. Many students do not find their lessons intellectually stimulating. Students want and need work that challenges their abilities but that also provides the opportunity to be successful. This is only partly a matter of the content; it is also a matter of effective teaching and of fair assessment practices. Students do better when they feel they have some input into the kind of work they do, opportunities to improve their work, and teaching that pays attention to their background knowledge and interests.

The fourth key factor is a respectful environment, where staff and students treat one another with consideration and thoughtfulness, where students have a voice in how the school operates, and where rules show consideration for students' individual needs and circumstances.

High schools that embody these features will have better outcomes and better graduation rates.

For online resources on helping students stay in school as well as the research references that inform this issue, please visit:

www.cea-ace.ca/facts-on-education

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